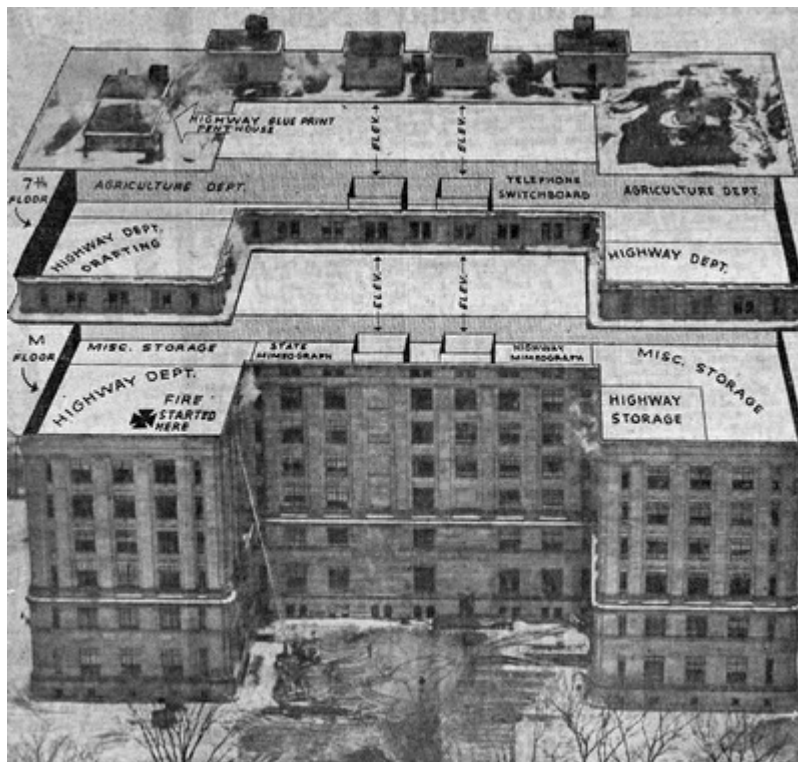


the state office building fire

December 11, 1934



The State Office Building, or the Cass Building as it is known today, was constructed between 1919-1922 at a cost of \$3,000,000.



At 12:40, a state worker pulled the fire alarm located on the seventh floor. Within minutes, five fire trucks and fifty firefighters were on the

scene. They raced to the sixth and seventh floor to attack the fire on the mezzanine level. The burning paper and microfilm created such intense heat that the firefighters were driven back.

The firefighters regrouped and again attempted to attack the fire internally; they were once more driven back by flames, smoke and the obstacle created by the vault like doors. The decision is made to fight the fire from the outside.

Later, aerial trucks from Lansing, Battle Creek, Jackson and Flint, as well as boom trucks from Jarvis Engineering and Reniger Construction were brought in to pour over five million gallons of water on the blaze. Much of the damage on the lower floors was due to the water cascading down from the upper floors and freezing in the 10-degree below zero temperature.

Throughout the night firefighters battled the blaze in freezing temperatures. The fire burned all day Friday and part of Saturday, by that time the blaze had consumed all the fuel available on the seventh floor.





The fire so completely destroyed the seventh floor and the mezzanine level that they were never replaced. In a description of the fire-ravaged floors written soon after the fire, Seth Whitmore describes the destruction. “Huge concrete columns have fallen apart. Concrete weakened by the intense heat of fire fell away from the reinforced steel. Huge sections of the seventh floor collapsed.” Steel melted in the intense heat and the seventh floor collapsed onto the mezzanine level. The massive thickness of the mezzanine’s floor prevented a collapse of all the floors in the building.





Richard C. Shay, 19 (standing) confessed to setting the fire. Although his account is confused it seems that Shay started the fire at about 11:42 when he left for lunch and not 12:38 as he later claimed. The Fire Department arrived on the scene at 12:45 and the blaze was firmly established, expert witness testimony confirmed that the blaze must have been burning for at least thirty minutes before the first alarm sounded. Shay was sentenced to 10 years for his role in the fire; he served 6 and was discharged on 3/26/1957. The real damage from the fire was assessed at \$8,000,000.